



CHILD IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

Parents, guardians, and other family members are constantly searching for advice about how to keep children safer. To help, we've singled out some common areas of interest regarding precautionary child identification and safety measures. For more information about these and other safety topics in specific situations, please contact NCMEC at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

Photo Identification (ID)

Families should have current photographs of their children. These photographs can often be obtained free-of-charge or for a nominal fee from a number of sources. The photograph should be a full-face shot in color, and capture the way children really look. Photographs should be taken at least every six months and kept in a safe and readily accessible place.

In addition to the photograph, parents and guardians should also have a written description of their children. The description should include:

Hair color;

Eye color;

Weight;

Height;

Date of Birth; and

Unique physical attributes such as eyeglasses, braces, or piercings.

Dentition

Dental X-rays, professional dental charting, and bite impressions (tooth prints) are all useful in making identifications but will not help to find a missing child. Parents and guardians should update dental charts every 2 years until children are 18.

Parents and guardians may also choose to have bite impressions made using Styrofoam®. Only a trained dental professional should take the impression.

Please check with your family dentist to determine if this service is offered.

Dentition may last for many years and can withstand elements such as fire. This sample should be stored in a safe and readily accessible place.

Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA)

DNA is a key element of what families should have on hand for their children's identification. Like fingerprints and dentition, DNA will not help find a missing child but is used to identify someone. DNA has become the "gold standard" for all identification matters.

NCMEC strongly encourages parents and guardians to take a DNA sample of their children as a precautionary measure in case their children become missing. No one should store DNA except parents and guardians.



Fingerprints

Fingerprints are used for identification. They should be taken by a trained professional and recorded on a paper stock that will be usable for loading in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Crime Information Center, if your child should become missing.

As with all of these methods of identification, fingerprinting can be taken and stored at little or no cost. Retailers, supermarket chains, and other companies often provide opportunities for parents and guardians to have one or more of these identification tools taken for their children. Only parents or guardians should store these items or test results of their children.

Medical Reports

Families should know where their children's medical records are located. Medical records such as X-rays, permanent scars, blemishes, birthmarks, or broken bones can be helpful in identifying a recovered child. Ask your family doctor if those records can be easily accessed if needed.

Child Safety

Effective child-safety programs are ones children will enjoy, understand, and ultimately help to change children's behavior. The fundamental idea of prevention education is that children with self-confidence, grounded in safety competence and high self-esteem, are less vulnerable targets for victimization.¹ NCMEC offers many resources to assist parents and guardians.